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ABSTRACT

The increase in global mobility has brought about the recent increase in the number of students who are not from the majority culture in classrooms across the United States and Canada and who report experiencing loneliness and social isolation. The students' loss of self-esteem and the development of learned helplessness are directly related to the persistence of their experiences of loneliness. This study analyzed 10 immigrant elementary school students' descriptions of their experience of loneliness, as part of a larger-scale interview study on loneliness in 75 Canadian elementary school students. Transcripts were analyzed from the point of view that deficits in affective, motivational, and cognitive areas are created as a result of the lack of a school culture of acceptance and belongingness. Students' remarks illustrated how lack of satisfying peer relationships leads to: (1) loneliness, lowered self-esteem, and lack of desire to go to school; (2) expectations to fail and reluctance to initiate social contacts; and (3) lack of confidence in their abilities. Findings suggest that pedagogical thoughtfulness and tactfulness on the part of the teacher are required so that immigrant students can be provided more opportunities to connect with their peers as they participate in shared meaningful experiences. Such experiences can provide all students and teachers with opportunities to relate to one another and to strengthen their sense of belongingness to the school community. (Contains 69 references.) (KB)

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Social Isolation, Loneliness and Immigrant Students' Search for Belongingness: From Helplessness to Hopefulness

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Abstract

The increase in global mobility has brought about the recent increase in the number of students who are not from the majority culture in classrooms across the U.S and Canada and who report experiencing loneliness of social isolation. The students' loss of self-esteem and sense of self-worth and the development of "learned helplessness" syndrome are directly related to the persistence of their experiences of loneliness. Descriptions gathered from ten immigrant elementary school students from one school in Western Canada were analyzed in lieu to the premise that the deficits in the affective, motivational and cognitive areas are created as a result of the lack of a school culture of acceptance and belongingness. The "cure" for helplessness was seen from the point of view of pedagogy of loneliness as a means of creating a school environment in which all children belong. Pedagogical thoughtfulness and tactfulness on the part of the teacher are required so that immigrant students can be provided with more, not fewer, opportunities to connect to their peers as they participate in shared meaningful experiences as a possibility to form social bonds. Such experiences can provide all students and teachers with opportunities to relate to one another and thus to strengthen their sense of belongingness to the school community.

Introduction

Although the number of students who are not from the majority culture and whose families have immigrated to the United States and Canada is growing fast and is expected to continue to grow, research about these students' school experiences is quite limited (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001). The ethnographic research that has been done about immigrant children and their school experiences (e.g. Duran & Weffer, 1992; Suarez-Orozco, 1989) point to the multiple problems these children face in learning a new language, in coping with the disruption of family life and poverty, and adjusting to a new culture that often conflicts with their own cultural values. The multiple losses the children and their families experience, the fears, confusion, sadness, alienation they feel are carried with the children to their new schools. Yet,

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there is still insufficient awareness of the relationship between the child's struggle with the stressors of migration and assimilation, and his or her learning experiences. "Although educational practices attempt to place the child in a holistic framework and thus acknowledge his or her multiple needs, the reality of day-to-day workings in school is quite different" (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001, p. 49).

Social isolation and loneliness seem to be common experiences of immigrant children regardless of their racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. As a result of their inability to become accepted members of their peer group immigrant children experience the loneliness of being excluded, unwanted and disliked, as well as 'empty of happiness' (Kirova-Petrova, 2000; 2001). Problems of loneliness are particularly acute in migration, as one "ceases to belong to the world one left behind, and does not yet belong to the world in which one has nearly arrived" (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989, p. 23). The problem of loneliness acquires even greater significance while viewed from the point of view of the hypothesis that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). If immigrant children's struggle to belong, defined as "a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (p. 497) is unsuccessful, its impact on their emotional and cognitive patterns will be negative. "Being accepted, included, or welcomed leads to positive emotions such as happiness, elation, commitment and calm, while being rejected, excluded or ignored leads to often intense negative feelings of anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy, and loneliness" (Osterman, 2001, p. 327).

Research on peer relationships and their impact on self-esteem, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and school achievement, as well as on students' sense of community has been recently

reviewed by Osterman (2001). This extensive review, however, reports only one study pertaining to immigrant population (Gordon, 1996)—a study indicates that schools do not satisfy Hispanic adolescents' belongingness needs and that the environment is not supportive in this area. It is clear that immigrant children's experiences in adjusting to the school culture, and their struggle to form significant interpersonal relationships with their peers has not been sufficiently addressed.

Traditionally, however, students who are second-language learners, poor or racially 'different' from the norm were defined in the educational journals as being "at risk" (Boyle-Baise & Grant, 1992). Thus "differences were seen as a prelude to deficiencies" (p.176). Students who are coming to school with social cues, language and experiences different from those of the dominant culture have been considered emotionally disadvantaged before they even start school (Ellis, 1999). If the children who are different from the majority culture are identified in the educational literature as having some sort of a "handicapping condition," is it surprising that they see themselves in a similar way? How does the advantage of speaking another language or having a deep knowledge of a different culture become a disadvantage in the school system? How do immigrant students' rejected attempts to become members of the peer group affect their self-esteem, sense of self-worth and their overall desire to go to school? How can schools become a place where all students belong? These questions are explored in this article from the point of view of ten elementary school children who were representatives of eight different minority cultures in one school in Western Canada. These children's families have immigrated to Canada not more that three years before the time of the study.

Peer Rejection, Social Loneliness and Learned Helplessness

The possibility that loneliness would accompany peer rejection is quite high given the difficulty rejected children have in relating to other children in school (Asher, Parkhurst, Hymel, & Williams, 1990). Loneliness has been identified as the distressing emotional condition that arises when one feels rejected by, estranged from, or misunderstood by others and when one lacks companions for social activities and emotional intimacy (Rook, 1984). Thus, loneliness reflects "an individual's subjective perception of deficiency in his or her relationships" (Russell, Cutrona, Rose & Yurko, 1984, p.131). Loneliness can emerge when one perceives a discrepancy between desired and achieved relationships (Peplau, Micheli, & Morasch, 1982; Perlman & Peplau, 1982) and when one has deficiencies in skills that are necessary for developing appropriate intimate and social relationships (de Jong-Gierveld, 1987). One of the identified kinds of loneliness, social loneliness (Weiss, 1987), may be experienced by individuals who may be living in a new location with a limited means of developing friendships, such as is commonly the case with students arriving for the first time in a new school setting (Kirova-Petrova, 1996 a; Margalit, 1994; Rothbaum & Weisz, 1989). Thus, social loneliness can result from a lack of social network from which one might draw support.

A sociological approach to loneliness emphasizes social forces leading to increased loneliness in contemporary society. Bowman (1955) for example hypothesizes three social forces causing this phenomenon: a) a decline in primary group relations; b) an increase in family mobility; and c) an increase in social mobility. The increase in global mobility has brought about the recent increase in the number of students who are not from the majority culture in classrooms across the U.S and Canada. These students are likely to experience social loneliness (Kirova-Petrova, 2000; 2001). A study by Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester (2001) which focused on

immigrant children's mental health needs, gave voice to these children's embarrassment at not knowing the new language or culture, fear of not fitting into their new school and new neighborhood, feelings of vulnerability, silence, and withdrawal from peers in the class. The children were unsure about the proper ways to act in new situations and were scared that they would be seen as different from other peers. The lack of knowing English was the key source of embarrassment and shame which contributed to these children's feelings of being inadequate. However, the loneliness of being left out is not "cured" by simply learning the language.

Socially lonely individuals also experience feelings of being socially marginal (Weiss, 1973). As Ponzetti (1990) points out, these feelings "fracture people's self-esteem and cause them to believe they cannot help themselves" (p. 338). Seligman (1975), whose research initially focused on migrant workers and on economically poor or ethnically different people who suffer from exclusion from full participation in the mainstream of society, described a syndrome known as "learned helplessness." He argued that "learned helplessness is caused by learning that responding is independent of reinforcement " (p. 93). Individuals, who exhibit the syndrome, are slow to initiate responses, believe themselves to be powerless and hopeless and see their future as bleak. Alloy and Seligman (1979) suggest that "learned helplessness syndrome" creates three types of deficit:

- **Affective**: Students have low self-esteem, suffer from classroom anxiety and feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- **Motivational**: Students expect to fail and are reluctant to even attempt either initiating social contacts or learning academic skills.
- **Cognitive**: Students lack confidence in their abilities and do not participate in activities

providing them with opportunities to improve abilities and skills.

Although the Learned Helplessness model was proposed to explain depression (Seligman, 1975), there are studies that indicated a relationship between loneliness and isolation at school and the development of the "learned helplessness" syndrome (Page, Scanlan & Deringer, 1994) associated with persistent experiences of loneliness over a long period of time. However, more research is needed in this area.

The following section provides synopses of ten immigrant children's descriptions of their lived experiences of loneliness at school. The experiences of loneliness described by children that are presented in this article were gathered in a larger-scale research project on elementary schoolchildren's loneliness that was conducted in Canada (Kirova-Petrova, 1996; 2000). In that study, seventy-five children, kindergarten through grade five, were interviewed about their experiences of loneliness. Ten of these (six boys and four girls) were students whose families had immigrated to Canada in the past three years. The names of all children whose words are used in this text have been changed to protect their right to privacy.

All conversations were taped and transcribed as closely as possible to the original way in which they were spoken. For the purposes of this article, the experiential accounts were analyzed from the point of view of deficits in the affective, motivational and cognitive areas are created in immigrant children as a result of the lack of a school culture of acceptance and belongingness.

Affective Deficit: Low Self-esteem, Loneliness and Classroom Anxiety

"One of the most frequent and consistent correlates of loneliness has been poor self-esteem' (Jones, 1982, p.238). Self-esteem is described as a pattern of beliefs that individuals possess regarding their self-worth and is often based on perceptions of personal experiences and

feedback from significant others (Meggert, 1989). The thematic analysis of the conversations with the participants allowed me to capture the lived meaning of loneliness in immigrant children's lives and the role it plays in their loss of self-esteem and the desire to go to school where they did not "feel good" about themselves. Being different and going to a place that is different from everything that the children knew at home was experienced by the interviewed children as the reason for their exclusion from the peer group. Language played a major role in the experience of being different from the rest of the children. For Luka, an eight-year-old boy from the former Yugoslavia, the inability to communicate with his peers made him feel "bad" about himself.

> "Sometimes I tried to talk to them but they didn't understand what I was saying. There was only one person who really tried to understand me but the others just bugged me because I couldn't speak like them. I felt really bad," said Luka.

Anxiety about going to the school and facing the minute-to-minute challenge of making sense of the world around was also expressed by Mustafa, a ten-year old boy who came a year earlier from Iran. He didn't know how to speak English so he "just sat on the hill and watched the others." He recalled: "I was a complete stranger. I felt very lonely at recess. I didn't understand the rules of the games. I felt like there was a hole in my chest." In their psychological study of loneliness Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) point out that the most frequently stated description of loneliness by the participants was "it feels like there is a hole or space inside my chest." Mustafa, however, not only felt the pain of rejection bodily as a "hole" in his chest, but he also attributed his failures to connect to his peers as a personal deficiency. "I felt that I have something less than anybody else. I didn't like coming to school because I didn't feel good about

it," said Mustafa. The real adversity of not having a common language with the rest of the students in the school or at least an understanding of the game rules, was interpreted by Mustafa as a personal deficiency, which in turn brought the expectation that he will continue to feel that way. Consequently, this expectation resulted in his lack of desire to go to school. Rejected children's difficulties in school adjustment including liking, attitudes toward teachers and activities, manifest anxiety, and school avoidance, are also found in a study of 125 kindergartners (Ladd, 1990). However, if the immigrant children believe that they have "something less" than the rest of the children then they may also experience themselves as not worthy of love and respect. Their descriptions revealed that they were painfully aware that they are all they've got. As this awareness grew so did their sense of isolation. Social exclusion is the most common and important cause of anxiety (Baumeister & Tice, 1990) and is identified as the source of "basic anxiety" which is the feeling of "being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world " (Horney, 1945, cited in Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 506).

While looked from the point of view of the theory of belongingness as a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), it appears that the emotional deficit created by the lack of satisfying peer relationships leads to loneliness, lowered self-esteem, a sense of self-worthlessness and an overall lack of desire to go to school. This possibility is further supported by Sletta, Valas and Skaalvik's study (1996) which indicates that peer acceptance did predict loneliness, and that loneliness, in turn, influenced perceptions of self-esteem and social competence.

Motivational Deficit: Expectation to Fail and Reluctance to Initiate Social Contacts

Studies on children's loneliness (Asher et al., 1990) suggests that peer rejection, social

withdrawal, and victimization by peers are factors predicting the feeling of loneliness and depressed mood over time. It is clear from the research that rejected children are less successful in initiating interactions (Putallaz & Wasserman, 1990), and even when interacting they do not remain engaged with other children for very long but move from interaction to interaction more frequently than do other children (Ladd, 1983). Furthermore, lonely children were initially more rejected and victimized and became more rejected over time (e.g. Boivin, Hymel & Burkowski, 1995).

The descriptions provided by the participants revealed immigrant children's failing attempts to "fit" into the peer group. Their attempts were often misinterpreted and rejected by their peers, leaving these children with the pain of feeling excluded, unwanted and disliked. The description provided by one of the students I interviewed is a powerful example of exclusion by omission in a situation in which nothing was done to ensure his inclusion as a respected and valued member of the team. Au, a boy from China, remembered one instance in which his classmates were playing hockey at recess. He was there too, but he wasn't really playing because nobody ever passed to him. "I was sitting there with a hockey stick in my hands. It didn't really matter if I was there or not … I mean for them. I think that nobody wanted to do anything with me because I was different," said Au.

He was there, with a hockey stick in his hands, ready to contribute to the game, but no one seemed to notice him. He was invisible, useless in the team. Au's description of his experience of being excluded gains even greater significance while viewed in the light of a number of studies showing that when previously unacquainted boys were randomly assigned to newly created groups, group identification ties ensue rapidly (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood &

Sherif, 1961/ 1988). This, however, was not the case with Au. He was convinced that because he was so "different" he was denied access to the team; he remained an out-of group individual. The lack of acknowledgment of his existence by the rest of the team members was the most painful part of the experience. "The need to matter in the eyes of the other has psychological significance as an aspect of forming a sense of self in relation to the world " (Josselson, 1992, pp. 99-100). Thus, children who persistently feel excluded, who feel that they have no connection to others, which is the reality for language minority children during the period of learning the basic verbal communication skills, suffer a special challenge in the process of the formation of the self.

It seems that repeated unsuccessful attempts to "fit" into the peer group damages children's self-esteem as they begin to question not only their own ability to learn how to be successful in initiating social interactions, but also their own worth. Gradually some children became convinced that nobody wanted to do anything with them because they are "different from everyone else" as Sonja, a nine-year-old girl from Ukraine, put it. Name-calling and overt rejection helps confirm that they are "stupid" and that being different is a "bad thing". Luka, an eight-year-old boy from former Yugoslavia felt that nobody liked him because he was different. "Everyone was calling me names. No matter what I did I couldn't fit. I was lonely, very lonely," said Luka.

Children whose interactions with their peers are negative, who receive information that they are not valued, who feel unwelcome or rejected, "are less likely to initiate 'prosocial' behaviors, adopting instead patterns of withdrawal or aggression" (Osterman, 2001, p. 351). Most of the interviewed children expressed their reluctance to initiate social contacts. They stated they "just sat there and watched the others play." The children felt separated, disliked, unwanted,

cut off from the shared world of the others. Their desire to belong to the communal world of their classmates, on the one hand, and the impossibility of fulfilling this desire, on the other hand, created a vacuum not only between them and their peers, but most of all inside themselves. The inner emptiness is experienced as a "hole" in the chest.

The experiential accounts presented here suggest that the lack of friends that the children who have very limited if any proficiency in English experience at school, strongly affects their self-esteem and sense of self-worth, and contributes to loneliness and the inability to develop both social and academic skills. Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester (2001) quote a ten-year old girl, participating in their study who said, "Back home I thought I was smart, I did okay in school, but now I feel stupid and just sit quiet" (p. 57).

Not only do children report "feeling stupid" and not participating in class, but also their minds are preoccupied with their social and emotional adversity, which made it difficult to focus or concentrate on academics when they were overwhelmed by their feelings of isolation (Phelan, Locke Davidson & Yu, 1993). If the children in the present study perceived themselves as "having something less than anybody else", and often feel "stupid, like I don't know anything at all," it is not surprising that they may feel helpless and some will give up hope in changing their status in the peer group. Maria, one of the girls interviewed said, "There is no point in trying anymore. They think I'm stupid and that's it. I used to cry a lot but now .... And it's only because I like different things."

Cognitive Deficit: Lack of Confidence in Their Abilities

The lack of proficiency in the English language was described by the children as having the main role in the experience of being different from the rest of the children. The increased

awareness of the fact that speech is produced by physical organs that belong to our bodies, seemed to have the potential to change the children's experiences of themselves and their view of their own abilities. It is well accepted that for most English as Second Language children, there is a stage, in which they mix or combine languages (NAEYC Position Statement, 1996). This can create a belief that they have no control over their learning to speak and may lead to lack of thrust in one's unreliable "mouth". This is how my own son who was a participant in the study, described this period of his experience of learning English as a second language:

> It was like I couldn't control what was going to come out of my mouth. It was in my head, I could hear the appropriate sounds but when I opened my mouth, the sounds were very different from the ones I thought they would be. I was really embarrassed and didn't want to talk at all. It was like I couldn't trust myself anymore. I felt so stupid. Sometimes it was very difficult for me to find the word I needed, so I would replace it with another English or Bulgarian word. Nobody seemed to make sense of what I was trying to say so they just ignored me or even worse, laughed at me. It was lonely, you know…

The confidence in producing the intended sounds was lowered even further because of the fear of being ridiculed by their peers. Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester (2001) report one child's disclosure of such a fear: "I hate it when other kids make fun of my accent, so I don't say anything" (p. 49). Being laughed at is a real threat and most English as a Second Language learners try to avoid it at any cost. In one of my student's observations in a classroom during her student teaching, a child who had spent almost a year in the classroom working exclusively with a bilingual paraprofessional was heard for the first time. The surprised classmates responded with amazement "He can talk!" Because of their lack of confidence in themselves and their ability to

learn, these children do not use their developing skills in as many situations as possible and deprive themselves of opportunities to improve them thus further distancing them from the achievement of their goal—becoming a member of the community. The lack of common language with their peers creates a very real barrier between the immigrant children and the rest of the school population. Overcoming this barrier is a long and sometimes very painful process for many of these children during which they may become victims of rejection, stigmatization and public humiliation and consequently develop some of the symptoms of the learned helplessness syndrome.

In the following sections I would argue that in order for immigrant children to be able to overcome loneliness and resist helplessness, some significant changes in the overall school culture need to occur. I would also argue that pedagogy of loneliness can help us create a school environment in which all children belong.

Pedagogy of Loneliness: Assisting Immigrant Children in Resisting Helplessness

Pedagogy of loneliness is not about acquiring "how-to-do" skills and techniques to deal with the "problem of loneliness and social isolation" our immigrant students experience at school. Rather, it is about understanding each individual child's social world, and the role loneliness and social isolation plays in that world. Pedagogy of loneliness, therefore, calls upon our moral responsibilities to all our students in the contemporary world in which young people stand in more uncertain, ambivalent, reflective and critical relations to their own traditions at the familial, social and cultural levels (van Manen, 1991). Pedagogy of loneliness can provide an important reference point from which to examine the possibility of building connectedness in school.

A large body of research on loneliness confirms that it is not so much the quantity of relationships that the individual has but their quality (Cutrona, 1982; Fisher and Phillips, 1982; Jones, Freemon and Goswick, 1981; Wintrob, 1987). The pedagogical implications of these findings seem to reinforce the notion of fostering the personal quality of our relations with our students. They seem to suggest that we need to be there in a personal way for all our students especially those who may feel lonely and isolated. The pedagogical relationship between a teacher and a lonely child should begin with sensitive and detailed observations of the child's appearance (timid, anxious, sad or unsure of self), social skills (lack of or reluctance to use them) and social status in the peer group (rejected by peers or avoiding other children by choice) (Bullock, 1993). Once the teacher "recognizes" the child's feelings, he or she needs to establish and maintain such pedagogical relations so children feel loved, respected and cared for. "Teachers play a major role in determining whether students feel that they are cared for and that they are welcome part of the school community" (Osterman, 2001, p. 351). Thus, teacher-child relationship has a potential to satisfy the child's need to belong in a sense that he or she will begin to develop trust in the teacher's love and genuine concern about his or her well being. This trustful relationship, however, is built gradually in the process of accumulating shared experiences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

It has been argued that with young children in particular, shared everyday activities, such as singing, chanting, looking at a picture book, playing tag during recess, or just being physically close to the child during even the most common daily routines, can create a sense of togetherness while leaving the child the personal space he or she needs (Igoa, 1995; Kirova-Petrova, 1996 b; Kirova, 2001). In addition, arranging the physical space in the classrooms, effective use of non-

verbal communication, as well as the use of art, music, and movement as powerful means of individual expression can create a sense of belonging to the group (Kirova-Petrova, 2000; Kirova, 2000

). If intentionally planned and organized, such shared experiences can have not only high personal value for the child who feels lonely but also set up a pedagogical tone in the class the other students can mirror. A number of studies reviewed by Osterman (2001) demonstrate that teacher preferences and pattern of interactions with students influence the nature of peer relationships, with peer acceptance mirroring teacher preferences.

The teacher, however, should not aim at substituting for the child's friends. Rather, by being present to the child he or she can bring to the child the simple pleasure of togetherness. This experience of being recognized as an individual could change the way the child sees him or herself; it could become the beginning of hope-fullness. Thus, to have a pedagogical relationship with a student who feels lonely also means that the teacher lives with hope for that child. "Having hope for a child", as van Manen says, "is much more a way of being present to the child than it is a kind of doing" (1991, p. 76). The relation of hope to the experience of inter-subjectivity is stressed by Marcel (1978). It seems then that the experience of communion could be the door to hope.

> We might say that hope is essentially the availability of a soul which has entered intimately into the experience of communion to accomplish in the teeth of will and knowledge of transcendent act—the act establishing the vital regeneration of which this experience affords both the pledge and the first-fruits. (Marcel, 1978, p. 67)

Jevne (1990) too states that hope is a shared experience; "It is always experienced, through the creative process of imagination, in relationship to someone or something" (p. 30). From this perspective, hope seems to be one source of strength in all healing processes. Korner (1970) conceptualized hope as a coping strategy to motivate action. He suggests that is energizing and essential for healthy coping. Hope involves a trustful expectation, "watching out for"; it resides in the will and it is a disposition or tendency, which may result in action or striving. Thus, according to Korner, hope can assist an individual to avoid despair and unpleasant or stressful situations. Gaining confidence in approaching their peers is a sign of an active hope expressed by the children who are socially isolated and feel lonely. Taking the initiative in establishing the first meaningful peer relationship is experienced by the interviewed children as a new beginning marked by the child's trustful expectation that he or she will become an accepted member of the group. This is how Luka described his first successful entry into the peer group:

> I couldn't really speak English at the beginning. I didn't have anybody to play with, and I didn't know anybody. Everything was so different. I didn't even know the games they were playing at recess. I never played football or hockey before. I couldn't understand what these games were about. I felt really lonely at recess…
>
> But one recess they started playing basketball, and I asked to play along. They said okay, but were not really enthusiastic. If the lunch supervisor [had not been] there, they probably would not have even let me touch the ball. But when they saw me playing, they understood that I am very good. After that, they wanted me on their team. I made friends. I wasn't lonely anymore. (Kirova-Petrova, 1996 b, pp.13-14)

The pedagogical task we have then seems to be to create opportunities for meaningful social interactions to occur. However, being physically there, like the lunch supervisor was in Luka's story, is important but is not enough. Creating a school culture of understanding and acceptance is what our pedagogical task should be. In such a culture all children are provided with the opportunity to find ways to connect to others as a possibility to fulfill their need to belong.

Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester (2001) report a success of a project that "celebrates culture and connection as the same time that it promotes hope through mentoring, educational opportunities, and awareness of and respect for cultural differences" (p. 54). According to the authors, the purpose of the project Mi Tierra/My Country's is to enhance bilingual adjustment and to promote attachment to the host school as the Latino immigrant children's mental health needs are being addressed. This attachment has the potential to satisfy their need to belong, which as Baumeister and Leary (1995) point out, is different than a need for mere affiliation. "Frequent contacts with nonsupportive, indifferent others can go only so far in promoting one's general well-being and would do little to satisfy the need to belong" (p. 500). The authors further suggest that the latter can be satisfied only by "regular social contacts with those to whom one feels connected" (p. 501). Can schools satisfy *all* students' need to belong?

School: A Place to Connect, a Place to Belong

As the children's descriptions provided above demonstrated, school was not a very welcoming place for the students who were different from the norm, for those who came from linguistic and cultural backgrounds that were not the majority in the school population. The interviewed children reported that they felt lonely, excluded, unwonted and disliked. They felt

that unless they learn how to "do things" and to be like the majority of their peers, or at least to sound like them, there is little or no chance to be accepted. Being accepted is the first step toward being connected or related to the others in their social group and context. "To experience relatedness, students must feel that they are worthy of respect and that the others in their group or social context care for them. Their beliefs about themselves develop through their interactions" (Osterman, 2001, p. 351). Peers, however, tend to associate with those they define as "friends" and those friends tend to be like themselves in terms of race, class, gender, and perceived academic performance (Cairns et al., 1985; Johnson et al., 1983; Kagan, 1990; Kinderman, 1993; Urdan, 1997). Thus, the peer interactions described by the immigrant students participating in the study presented in this article indicate that they experience pressure to become the "same" as soon as possible so that they can "fit in". However, the speed with which this process of assimilation into the dominant school culture occurs cannot produce results in time to satisfy the need to belong, which leaves the immigrant children in a social vacuum experienced as loneliness. As a result, some are left to believe that they are "stupid", that they will "never learn" and that being different means having "something less than anybody else". This is because, as May (1994) points out "the school's store of social and cultural knowledge tends to reflect and reinforce the knowledge and experience of majority group children" (p. 2). Thus, class and culture create boundaries and encourage the designation of otherness, difference and deficiency (Rose, 1989). It is not surprising then that Goodenow and Grady's (1993) study of students' sense of belonging found that it is lower in an urban working class city with a large Hispanic and African American population than in a suburban white school.

Teachers, however, have repeatedly claimed that to them all children are the same and should be treated the same (Rezai-Rashit, 1995). Viewed from a postmodern perspective, however, this culture-blindness resulting in viewing all students as "the same" is symptomatic of a lack of understanding of the oppression and totalitarianism of "the same" (Levinas, cited in Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 39). Any appearance of unity "presupposes and requires a prior act of violence" (Butler, 1993, p.37). The challenge to educators therefore becomes how to establish the types of relationships that do not simply turn the Other into "the same."

Bauman argues that taking responsibility for the Other means not treating the Other as the same as us; rather the Other must be recognized as unique and unexchangable and the relationship must be to this 'concrete Other' (cited in Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 39). From this point of view, to be in a pedagogical relationship with a child means an obligation to the existence of Otherness, 'an infinite attention to the other' (Blanchot, cited in Readings, 1996, p. 161). This attention, however, should not be focused on the deficiencies the Others have. Nor should it be focused on "fixing" them so that the Others can be "mainstreamed." If we continue to look only for deficiencies, if we don't learn to listen to that "which cannot be said but which tries to make itself heard" (Readings, 1996, p. 165), we will continue to miss the opportunity to make the necessary shift from grasping the Other to respecting the Other for who they are.

For schools to become a place for all children to belong, they need to construct a social space in which the Other is not made into the same, but in which we work alongside the Other in a relationship where neither is the master and each listen to the thoughts of the Other. Children have many languages to express their thoughts and feelings. As Igoa (1995) puts it, "Children have innate wisdom. They often let us know what they need—if we could only listen and hear

what they are saying by their words, artwork and behavior" (p. 63). Only when pedagogues engage in the art of listening to what "cannot be said" can they move away from the understanding that we honor individual differences by keeping them invisible, by trying to treat everyone the same. Being equal does not mean being the same, and building a connected community, which John Dewey's philosophy (1958) suggests should be based on the individual members' different strengths rather than on the attempts to assimilate their individual differences to fit a predetermined universal model of "school behavior." For any school to become a place for all students to belong there needs to be a space for these particular children in that particular school to connect. For this connection to be possible there needs to be an opportunity for shared experiences through which the children are likely to develop social bonds. Thus, pedagogy for postmodern condition needs to be based on relationships, encounters and dialogue with other co-constructors, both adult and children (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). Providing such opportunities through the use of many symbolic languages children possess (e.g. gesture, movement, drawing, music, etc.) can grant many entry points for offering and negotiating of ideas, thoughts and feelings.

In her review of research on students' need for belonging in the school community, Osterman (2001) proposed that theoretically, "there should be a direct relationship between the frequency and quality of interaction and students' sense of community" (p. 347). The review also suggests that "although interaction influences acceptance, the reverse is also true: Interaction is affected by one's sense of acceptance, with students being more open and involved when they anticipate favorable reactions from classmates" (p. 348). Schools however, fail to provide "a great deal of time for students to interact socially with their peers" (Phelps, 1990, cited in

Osterman, 2001. p. 348). Thus it is suggested that current classroom practices do not provide sufficient opportunity even for the majority students to be involved in interactions and thus to form social bonds. As a result, the schools fail to provide for the development of a school culture that satisfies students' need for belongingness.

> There is little formal attention to affective needs of students, and shaping the school culture are beliefs and practices that nurture individualism and competition, rather than community and collaboration. Integral to this culture are organizational policies and practices that systematically prevent and preclude the development of community among students and directly contribute to students' experiences of isolation, alienation and polarization. (Osterman, 2001, p. 324)

Summary

It has been argued so far that the lack of a school culture of acceptance and appreciation of differences among the individual members of the peer group leads to rejection of the immigrant children who are minority members of that group. As a result, they experience loneliness of social isolation. Peer rejection also leads the immigrant children to believe that because there are different, they have "something less than anyone else" and that no matter what they do they "can't fit in." In addition, they do not believe that they can do something about changing their position in the peer group and some "give up". These symptoms of the learned helplessness syndrome contribute to the development of deficits in the affective, motivational and cognitive areas. These deficits, therefore, are created in culturally and linguistically diverse students as a result of the lack of a school culture of acceptance. It seems then that the school culture produces "at-risk" children rather than helping children who are coming to it as "at-risk" students.

It was also argued that pedagogy of loneliness could help educators create a school

environment in which all children belong. The pedagogical understanding of the loneliness of their immigrant students means that the teachers would live in hope for their students – hope that gives them belief and trust in the children's possibilities. Only then can these students begin to trust in their own possibilities. Only then can they begin to develop a sense of purpose and a belief in a brighter future, including educational aspirations, achievement motivation, persistence, hopefulness, optimism, and a sense of connectedness. Thus, to help their language minority students become equal members of the classroom community, teachers need to respect children as unique individuals, value their background, heritage and interest, and deliberately seek any opportunity to acknowledge both verbally and nonverbally their language minority students' presence and achievements. By doing that they not only serve as role models for the rest of the students, but also set a classroom atmosphere of acceptance and mutual appreciation. However, teachers need to be aware of the danger to these students of losing their uniqueness as a result of the pressure to "fit" and create a climate in which the Otherness is understood and it is respected.

For the schools to become a place for all children to belong, we need to construct a social space in which all work alongside one another in a relationship in which none is the master and each listen to one another. Pedagogical thoughtfulness and tactfulness on the part of the teacher are required so that immigrant students can be provided with more, not fewer, opportunities to connect to their peers as they participate in shared meaningful experiences as a possibility to form social bonds. Such experiences can provide all students and teachers with opportunities to relate to one another and thus to strengthen their sense of belongingness to the school community.

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